The WDNF collection of dyslexia help and advice sheets,
edited by Ian Smythe

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**Dyslexia and the dyslexic individual**

by Ian Smythe

Dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty in the acquisition of fluent and accurate reading, writing and spelling skills, and is neurological in origin.

The term is derived from the Greek "dys" meaning difficulty, and "lexis" meaning words. It is estimated that dyslexia affects 4% of the population severely, and a further 6% show some dyslexic characteristics.

Dyslexia may be caused by a combination of phonological, visual and auditory processing deficits. Word retrieval and speed of processing difficulties may also be present. A number of possible underlying biological causes of these cognitive deficits have been identified, and it is probable that in any one individual there may be several causes.

In addition, dyslexia may also be related to a number of problems which may include some or all of the following:

- making errors with numbers, (mirror reversing numbers, or wrong sequence etc.)
- difficulty with organisational skills, including study time
- misplacing personal items such as pencils and rubbers.
- making mistakes copying things down (instructions, homework etc.)
- difficulty with orientation, such as navigating around a new school
- confusing left and right, dates, and missing appointments
- problems with explaining ideas and concepts, particularly on paper.
- word finding difficulties, and mispronunciation of long words.

Whilst the dyslexic individual may experience difficulties in the acquisition of reading, writing and spelling, they can be taught to find strategies and alternative learning methods to overcome most of these and other difficulties. However some problems, such as poor spelling, may persist into adulthood.

Every dyslexic is different, and should be treated as an individual. Many show talents actively sought by employers, such as good visuo-spatial skills, an ability to think holistically and see the bigger picture, and good lateral thinking. The same factors that cause literacy difficulties may also be responsible for highlighting positive attributes. For example, those finding difficulty solving a problem the way others do may tap resources that lead to more originality and creativity, a talent often noted in the dyslexic individual. Some people suggest that these attributes are only discovered thanks to the difficulty acquiring literacy skills.
Recognising dyslexia  
by Ian Smythe

Although dyslexia recognition may be seen as the identification of a series of difficulties which may cause difficulty with language acquisition (that is, in the areas of phonological segmentation and assembly skills, visual processing deficits and auditory processing deficits as well as word retrieval and speed of processing difficulties). Furthermore the underlying difficulties also appear in non-literacy areas, enabling dyslexia to be identified by behavioural (e.g. organisational and social skills) as well as literacy indicators.

Though the level of difficulty should be in comparison to other children of the same age, the following may be used as a guide to some of the indicators of dyslexia.

**Literacy related skills**
- has particular difficulty with reading and spelling, often related to problems in isolating and blending sounds, and matching sounds and symbols.
- puts letters and figures the wrong way round
- has difficulty with tables, alphabet
- leaves letters out of words or puts them in the wrong order
- takes longer than average to do written work
- gets 'tied up' using long words, eg. preliminary, philosophical
- has difficulty learning nursery rhymes

**Behavioural identifiers**
- has difficulty telling left from right, order of months of year etc.
- has a poor sense of direction
- lacks self confidence and has a poor self image
- is often accused of not listening or paying attention, misunderstands what is said, and may be literal in interpretation
- difficulty with motor skills, including handwriting and clapping a simple rhythm
- has a poor concept of time, and is often late
- gets confused when given several instructions at the same time
- has difficulty in organising themselves
- misplaces personal items such as key and books
- sometimes gives ‘creative’ solutions
- seems bright and alert, though failing in a few key areas.
Recognising dyslexia in adults
by Ian Smythe

The self-assessment checklist can be very useful to help the individual to come to terms with the nature and range of their own difficulties, and to provide a talking point to discuss life skills and the management of their dyslexia. Below is one abbreviated list, separated out into two categories. A more extensive list, currently being researched, may be found at http://web.ukonline.co.uk/wnf/adultchecklist.html

**Literacy related**
- Do you dislike reading aloud?
- Do you take longer than you should to read a page of a book?
- Do you find it difficult to remember the sense of what you have read?
- Do you dislike reading long books?
- Is your spelling poor?
- Is your writing difficult to read?

**Non-literacy**
- Do you find difficulty telling left from right?
- Is finding your way to a strange place confusing?
- Do you find it difficult to take messages on the telephone and pass them on correctly?
- Do you find it difficult to do sums in your head without using your fingers or paper?
- When using the telephone, do you tend to get the numbers mixed up when you dial?
- Do you find it difficult to say the months of the year forwards in a fluent manner?
- Do you mix up dates and times and miss appointments?
- When you have to say a long word, do you sometimes find it difficult to get all the sounds in the right order?
- Do you find forms difficult and confusing?
- Do you mix up bus numbers like 95 and 59?
- Did you find it hard to learn your multiplication tables at school?

(This list is based on the research by Michael Vinegrad. For full details, see - A revised Dyslexia Checklist. Educare, No 48, March 1994)

In a full assessment, the following should be measured:

a. Phonological segmentation skills; b. Auditory system (e.g. auditory short term memory, auditory perception, auditory discrimination, auditory sequential memory); c. Visual system (e.g. visual short term memory, visual perception, visual discrimination, visual sequential memory); d. Speed of processing; e. Semantic access; f. Other measures, including spelling tasks (single word spelling, non-word spelling and text from dictation), and reading tasks (single word reading, non-word reading) and texts for comprehension.
Assessing dyslexia
by Ian Smythe

Dyslexia should be assessed within a clear framework of understanding of the processes behind the acquisition of reading and writing skills. Current research suggests that phonological segmentation and assembly skills, visual system deficits, auditory processing deficits, word retrieval and speed of processing should all be investigated. Below is a battery of tests, based on the International Dyslexia Test, which may be used as a starting point, though it is far from exhaustive. This assessment battery is relevant no matter what the language of testing. It is also good in a bilingual context, where testing should be carried out in the language of teaching, provided the instructions are understood. Further useful information may also be deduced by further assessments in their home language.

An Assessment Battery

- Basic knowledge - alphabet and number knowledge
- Spelling - single word spelling and non-word spelling
- Reading - single word reading and non-word reading
- Phonological manipulation - alliteration and rhyme
- Phonological short-term memory - word and non-word repetition
- Lexical access - rapid naming
- Auditory discrimination
- Auditory short term memory - digit span and rhythm
- Visual system - visual sequential memory, visual perception, visual discrimination
- Sequencing - days of week and counting
- Perception/fine motor skills - shape copying
- Maths
- Visual IQ - Raven’s matrices
- Gross motor skill
- Other Factors e.g. questionnaire on the individuals history.
Helping the dyslexic individual at school

1. Make expectations high for their intellectual stimulation but reasonable for their written response.

2. Try using two colours in marking - one for content and another for spelling and presentation.

3. Try to understand the reasons for their mistakes and give them the chance to explain their difficulties to you.

4. Watch out for signs of tiredness and fatigue - dyslexic children have to try harder than other pupils which can be exhausting.

5. Be slow, quiet and deliberate in your instruction giving, allowing time for the meaning of the words to 'sink in'. Consider giving instructions verbally and in writing.

6. Where possible, use multi-sensory methods of learning. These simultaneously use all the senses so that potentially the child is able to see, hear, write and speak at the same time.

7. Give guidance about how to tackle all tasks systematically.

8. Watch out for signs of falling confidence and self-esteem.

9. Enable dyslexic children to show their interest, knowledge and skills, despite their difficulties with writing. Often they will be able to 'shine' orally and teachers should encourage this.

10. Arranged so that during class lessons, the dyslexic child can sit near the front, and preferably alongside well-motivated children or a 'study buddy' who they can ask to clarify instructions for them.

11. Equipped with clearly marked and neatly arranged resources so that they can be found easily.
Classroom management for primary schools teachers
by Elizabeth Henderson is a primary school headteacher, and has lectured widely.

Below are a series of tips for primary school teachers on classroom management, and how to provide a better learning environment for the dyslexic pupil.

1. Dyslexic pupils should always be sat facing the front, in a place you pass, or can see easily, so you may watch their progress and difficulties, including stress. Dyslexic children find any working from the board is very difficult, so minimise that activity, or make appropriate provision.

2. Over-teach things they are learning this week or last week, by writing a clue onto the back of their hand or on a crib card taped to their table (every time you pass remind and revise that point).

3. Use a portable tape recorder (“Walkman”) to tape short messages and instructions which they will be able to replay when needed.

4. Gather as many interested adult helpers as you can; teach them together in a small group how to teach your dyslexic children, (using blind-folds, sand trays, cursive handwriting, practice crib-cards etc).

5. Make a short ‘special’ time as often as possible to see the dyslexic child alone (five minutes before school, after school, before or after lunch can usually be arranged; mums will usually cooperate with this sort of strategy and can often find that daily moment reassuring too, if they feel free to join in sometimes).

6. Ensure you have regular (at least every term) meeting with the parents. Involve them as much as possible as they can be a useful ally. Do not forget that the parents may also be dyslexic.

7. Keeping a record book that goes home each night and signed by the parents.

8. Provide charts, crib-cards and flash cards for items they are likely to forget, from homework to sports kit to vocabulary. Using colour to help the children’s memories.

9. Encourage the child by setting an appropriate level of difficulty so that they can finish in the allotted time.

10. However slow the child’s progress, every day they must be able to see that they know something or can do something they could not do last week.
Whole school approach
by Neil McKay

1. Overcoming staff scepticism
   Make sure the staff know that it is the concern of all teachers, not just literacy staff

2. The value of investing in training
   Staff need training in recognition and remediation, and they need time to do it.

3. Evaluating results
   Pupils should be constantly monitored to verify improvements

4. Involve the parents
   Parents can be a major asset. Make sure they know how they can help.

5. Marking and assessment
   Make sure all teachers adopt a similar approach

6. Marking spelling errors
   Do not over correct. Chose a few key words or inconsistencies

7. Marking free writing
   If the task is to write freely, mark the content for creativity

8. Homework
   Remember what they knew yesterday they may not know today

9. Individual Education Plans (IEPs)
   Always treat every child as different
**Writing Individual Education Plans**
by Carol Orton, Information and Policy Manager at the British Dyslexia Association

*Below are a series of tips for writing an Individual Education Plan, which should enable the teaching of the child to be matched to their learning style.*

1. Identify what the child is finding it so hard to learn. For example, is it learning a second language, maths, new vocabulary in science etc.?

2. Find out why is he or she having such problems. For example, is it auditory short term memory, or phonological processing?

3. Try to assess the way he learns. For example, is a visual input better?

4. Try to identify how you can change the teaching in order to make him learn more easily.

5. Always ask why you have chosen that approach, and could there be a better way.

6. Identify the key components within the areas of - Who will deliver it? How often? Where?

7. Set meaningful targets. Ensure all the activities age and ability appropriate.

8. Constantly review, and identify why targets are not being met, or if they are, ask if the pupil is being stretched sufficiently.

9. Ask if there are viable alternatives, or other aspects, such as stress or behavioural management, that are not currently being covered.

10. Remember that only through a whole school approach will the pupil have an opportunity to maximise their potential. Ensure all teachers are informed of the difficulties, and how they can best help the situation.

The above list first appeared in the Dyslexia Handbook 1999, available from the British Dyslexia Association
Helping the dyslexic individual at home
by Jane Jacobson

Take careful note of the particular areas of difficulty your child has, and build a series of games and activities that may help to strengthen those areas. However, remember that the child often see home as the one place they can escape literacy work, so it is important to make activities as much fun as possible.

1. Nursery rhymes - try reciting them, and find games that can be used with them. Extend the game to finding other rhyming words

2. Poetry - Read poetry to children, especially amusing or nonsense poems, and make up your own with them.

3. Physical games - physical skills such as throwing, catching, kicking balls, skipping, jumping and balancing. For example Simon Says is a game which starts with very simple instructions, eg: “Simon says, clap your hands.” and gradually make it more difficult, eg: “Simon says, put your left hand behind your right knee.”

4. Kinaesthetic awareness - feeling letter shapes using wooden and plastic letters, wet or dry sand, or make letters out of plasticine or modelling clay.

5. Try variations on “I Spy” eg: “I spy with my little eye something beginning with the sound (b).”, “... with the same sound as ball.”, “… with the letter B.” “…that rhymes with bat.” “...ending with the sound (b).”

6. Auditory sequence - build ever increasing lists. For example “My grandmother went to market and she bought an apple, a pound of potatoes, a jar of honey ......” building up each time. Try different categories, or different letters or random items.

7. Dominoes - Dominoes require little setting up, and provide simple help with numbers, as well as visual sequencing. They are also available in other forms, using pictures and patterns for the child to match up for some variety.

8. Objects on a tray - Provide a tray of objects for the child to look at, then: (a) After a few seconds cover the tray and ask the child to name all the objects he saw, or (b) Ask the child to close his eyes. Remove one or two objects from the tray. Ask the child to open his eyes and say which objects he thinks were removed.
Helping the dyslexic individual with learning foreign languages
by Ian Smythe

Below are a series of tips for foreign language teachers which should enable the teaching of the child to be matched to their learning style. These tips are relevant for all language teaching, no matter what the child’s first language.

1. Always use concise appropriate terminology (explanations in the mother tongue of the child are often better) and over explain.

2. A picture is a good idea - it helps students visualise what they are trying to remember.

3. Try to provide keyword lists BEFORE the lesson. Listening to taped vocabulary before the lesson will also help the child.

4. Encourage the use of small labels with new words on. These can be left around the house on furniture, household objects etc. and help build basic vocabulary.

5. Encourage a "buddy" system, pairing a dyslexic with a non-dyslexic student, for both classwork and, where possible homework. This helps both students.

6. Remember that reading aloud can be painful and embarrassing. Conversation groups should be small where possible.

7. With each task ask what is important - spelling, syntax, grammar or content, and mark appropriately. Where reading and writing are involved, allow extra time.

8. When marking work, try where appropriate to indicate the nature of the error, particularly if it is a consistent one and back up with an oral explanation.

9. Polysyllabic words may be particularly difficult. An understanding of how the word is made up often helps the bright student.

10. Try to encourage and support, commending each improvement. Above all, show understanding.

Ian Smythe is a researcher in dyslexia in many languages, and editor of the Dyslexia Handbook 2000.
Helping the dyslexic individual with maths
by Steve Chinn

Try to use the facts you do know to work out the facts you do not know. For example, multiply 2 twice to get the four times tables facts, or halve the ten times facts to get the five times facts.

Do the same with addition and subtraction facts. Use what you do know and build around those facts. For example, to add 9 to a number, add 10 and then subtract 1. Or to subtract 9, first take away ten, and then add back 1. Add 6 as 5 plus one, and 7 as 5 plus 2.

Build up your confidence. Learn to be comfortable with an estimate, which you can then refine or check with a calculator. Take some risks!

Use the easy numbers to help you understand how methods work. For example, if you know that a half plus a quarter makes three quarters, then you have access to the basic procedure for adding fractions.

Learn that much of mathematics is inter-connected and use this to your advantage. For example, adding and multiplying are closely connected, so you could work out 7 x 8 by adding up seven lots of eight, or you could work out 5 x 8 by multiplication, then 2 x 8 and add the answers (40 plus 16) together to give 7 x 8 (56).

Go back to what you do know and understand. It will almost always be more than you think. Then use this to work at what you don’t understand. Build from firm foundations.

The concepts of mathematics start early and transfer onwards. Algebra, for example, uses all the rules of numeracy and is often easier than numbers. For example, adding up the lengths of three sides of a triangle might involve adding 37, 58 and 86. If it was algebra and the sides were a, b and c, the total is written as a + b + c, which is a much easier conclusion than 37 + 58 + 86 = 181.

Look for the development of an idea in maths. For example, 3 + 5 = 8 develops into 30 + 50 = 80, 300 + 500 = 800, 0.3 + 0.5 = 0.8, 3a + 5a = 8a.

Overview a problem before you start. See if you can get the whole picture and find the familiarity. For example, when adding a column of numbers, find the combinations which make ten and use these to reduce the adding task. 6 + 5 + 8 + 9 + 4 + 2 + 3 + 2 could be re-arranged as (6 + 4) + (5 + 2 + 3) + (8 + 2) + 9 = 10 + 10 + 10 + 9 = 39.

Try to rephrase word problems or represent the information in a diagram.
Helping the dyslexic individual - do's, don'ts and remembers

- Be enthusiastic about what you do
- Try to be interesting and vary resources
- Be flexible and willing to change your plans
- Keep each activity short and have a variety in each session
- Have some extra activities in reserve
- Remember to talk over what you have done in previous sessions
- Repeat what has been learnt, perhaps in a different way
- Allow time to work out strategies
- Remember some people do not like to read aloud
- Give praise and encouragement
- Think about trying to set achievable targets with the student for one or more sessions
- Let the student feel in control and that you value his ideas
- Try to correct and criticise in a positive way
- Try to finish each lesson with the student feeling successful
- Be a good listener
- Take a break - everyone needs it
- Relax and enjoy

Don't
- Be too ambitious
- Try to rush
- Ignore the students interests, hobbies and pastimes
- Compare your students to others
- Be surprised at what your student can't do
- Interrupt too quickly to correct reading
- Show your frustration if he gets it wrong
- Overload with too many activities in one session
- Pick out all errors - only the important ones
- Panic if things go wrong. Change the activity and return later.